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BODY:

One year ago 15,000 employees of Pacific Northwest Bell were told they could no longer smoke at work. Within six months of the company announcement 25 percent of the smokers signed up for smoking cessation programs and no employees have quit their jobs because of the smoking ban, according to Michael J. Martin, M.D., a UC-San Francisco clinical epidemiologist at San Francisco General Hospital. "The actual number of smokers who tried to quit is probably much larger because many smokers prefer to quit on their own rather than by going to cessation programs," Martin said. Martin commented on the results of the company's smoking policy in a report published in the Sept. 4 issue of the New England Journal of Medicine. None of the company's 4,000 smokers quit their job because of the smoking ban. "A few were irritated enough to write letters complaining about the ordinance," Martin said, "but that was about it." He added that enforcing the ban has not been a problem even though the company has over 800 buildings in three states. To date, there have been no lawsuits concerning the ban and the two unions representing company employees have supported it. "Much of the ban's success," Martin pointed out, "is because it was applied uniformly to all employees. Employees sometimes have objected to smoking bans that allow those with private offices to smoke while those in large open work areas cannot. This smoking policy applied equally to everyone." Many companies are thinking about instituting smoking bans, Martin said, because it will save them money. Published reports estimate that it costs a company between \$336 and \$601 more per year to employ a smoker compared to a nonsmoker. Most of this comes from higher health care costs and absenteeism. In the report, Martin addressed the issue of smoking bans in hospitals. While most hospitals have segregated smokers from nonsmokers and/or have prohibited the sale of cigarettes, a few hospitals have banned smoking completely. Two of them are the Public Health Service Indian Hospital on the Hopi Reservation and the Group Health Cooperative Hospital of Puget Sound. "It is now time for all hospitals to consider a smoking ban. Smoking is the greatest cause of premature death and disability in the United States and it would be ironic if health care institutions let the general business community take the lead in banning smoking in the workplace," he said. Martin pointed out that there are dramatic differences in the health of smokers and nonsmokers and that there is an improvement both in the short and long-term health status of individuals when they quit smoking. The long-term positive effects on serious diseases like lung cancer, emphysema and heart diseases have been demonstrated in numerous studies, he said. "The results of the Pacific Northwest Bell experience also indicate that even the employees who continued to smoke after the ban smoked less," Martin said. "Workplace smoking bans do encourage people to quit or smoke less and if they ever become the norm it will have a profound impact on this country's cigarette consumption." Martin, who is studying the effect of passive smoking on the risk of heart disease, feels there are proven risks associated

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with breathing other people's cigarette smoke. "The risks are clearly there and it is time to start protecting the rights of nonsmokers." Co-authors of the report are Annette Fehrenbach, Ph.D., psychiatric consultant at Pacific Northwest Bell, and Robert Rosner, executive director of the Smoking Policy Institute, Albers School of Business, Seattle University.

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